A STUDY ON GAP IDENTIFICATION IN THE TOURISM META-MARKET (AN EXPLORATORY STUDY)

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Abstract

Meta-markets constitute an important segment of any economy. The paper made an effort to identify the significant gaps available if any, among the meta-elements in the tourism meta-market. The study was exploratory by nature with a sample size of 300 respondents. It was centered within the geographical location of Guwahati which lies in the north eastern part of India. The study was based upon primary data and a well structured questionnaire was used for data collection. Further convenience sampling was used as a technique for the selection of the respondents.

From the market survey conducted, it was found that in tourism industry meta-market, meta-elements namely Cab Service (intercity), Skilled Tourist Guide, Translators, Rural Tourism and Heritage Tourism have major impact in the formation of the available gaps. These are vital inputs for the marketers so that they can formulate progressive marketing policies for meeting the identified gaps. Further it can generate employment and are potential areas in the tourism meta-markets that can generate more profits.

Key Words: Meta-market, Meta-elements, Potential, Implication, Variance.

Introduction

Meta-market represents a group of intimately related products that are spread across a diverse set of firms and which fulfill the requirement of a particular industry. The concept of meta-market according to Mohan Sawhney (1999) represents as a group of products and services on which consumers carry out a set of associated activities at the cognitive level. On the other hand, meta-elements are the individual components of any specific meta-market that is identified. For instance the meta-market of schools include

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books, stationery, uniform shops, school vans, buses, mobile apps for schools, footwear, counselors, mentors, school for illiterate adults, tablets and laptops, career planners, quality faculty and manpower, school bags, umbrella, rain coat, lunch box, water bottles, economy range water proof bags, digital resources and the like. Each individual element in the mobile phone meta-market is known as meta-elements.

Among the indicators of a sound and healthy meta-market, one key indicator is the existence of least amount of gap in the meta-market that exists. This calls for constant monitoring of the meta-elements of each meta-market with a view to see that each one of the element does not fall deficient in any way. When meta-markets are efficient, it accrues mutual benefits for both the buyers and the sellers. Buyers reap the benefits of wider choice and need not have to take extra efforts for search around a greater geographical spread to fulfill the felt need. On the other hand sellers get the opportunity to offer the buyers with meta-elements in the existing markets. In a nutshell, meta-market provides a ready and convenient market for the procuring of raw materials as well as for selling finished products to the final end consumers for an identified product.

Assam is regarded as the gateway to the Northeast of India. The state has borders that are shared with neighboring countries like Bangladesh and Bhutan. With its myriad heritage, history, culture, ethnicity and wildlife, Assam has a distinctive place in the north eastern part of India. The state is known for its tea, muga silk, petroleum resources, and bio-diversity. Being rich in natural resources including diverse flora and fauna, Assam is a popular destination in India for tourists. It is also flashpoint that provides vital link with the Southeast Asian countries for conducting trade. The tourism sector is a major investment prospect in the state of Assam. It constitutes around 5.5 per cent of Assam's GDP and 10.5 per cent of the total employment. In the year 2015-2016, the arrival of tourist in the state increased by a massive 16 per cent. In the month of October 2017, the 'Tourism Policy of Assam', was released by the Government of Assam which became effective from January 2018 and is to be continued till December 2022. The policy provided the industry status to the tourism sector. Further according to World Travel and Tourism Council, India will be a tourism hotspot from 2009-2018, having the highest 10-year growth potential.

Literature Review

The literatures reviewed are basically related to gaps identified in studies past studies conducted related to the tourism sector. These have been considered as they have found a position in major scholarly journals and have made impact on the identified field of the study.

Das (2017) in her research paper on the prospects and problems of tourism in Assam identified lack of quality accommodation, frequent power failures, communication gaps between the tourists and people and negative roles of media as the major areas that are required to be addressed. *Gogoi (2017)* in the paper on the economic contribution and challenges of the tourism sector pinpointed factors like lack of proper funds from the Government, absence of adequate infrastructure and tourist guides who are well trained as challenges that are required to be addressed. *Kalita (2017)* in the research work on rural tourism identified problems like improper Conservational measures by the Government, absence of adequate Infrastructural facilities, man-animal conflict, absence of organized markets and natural calamity (flood) as the challenges that are required to be addressed. *Chutia (2015)* is the paper on tourism industry in Assam has identified issues like hygienic and comfortable accommodation for stay, good transport and communication system, availability of professionally managed shops for dealing with local ethnic products and entertainment shows related to cultural heritage as the major areas that are required to be addressed. *Saha (2015)* in the research work on the challenges and opportunities in the tourism sector of north east India identified lack of an organizational set up and professionalism among the human resource, poor quality of hygiene and sanitation norms, lack of wayside facilities, untrained information guides and lack of proper security as the major ones of concern that are to be addressed. *Subash (2015)* in the study on the potentials, challenges and opportunities of tourism in India, identified deficiency in infrastructure, lack of sufficiently trained and skilled manpower, health and safety issues and disparate passengers with varied profiles that are to be addressed as the major areas that are required to be addressed. *Rizal and Asokan (2013)* in their research paper on tourism industry and its prospects in the north-eastern part of India identified shortage of funds, absence of proper infrastructure, transportation and lack of proper marketing efforts as the major issues that are required to be addressed. *Duarah and Mili (2013)* in the paper on tourism potentiality in north

east India have identified lack of infrastructure and communication, geographical isolation, lack of adequate security for tourists, unprofessional offer related to tourism deals and conditions, lack of proper infrastructure for online payment for accommodation, food, beverage arrangements, transport conveniences and travel bookings as the major areas that are required to be addressed. *Khound (2013)* in the research work on the identification of constrains and prospects in rural tourism has pinpointed issues like communication problem, lack of financial support, proper maintenance of heritage sites, availability of proper guest house and resort, lack of awareness of local people and lack of trained tourist guide as the major gaps that are required to be met. *Hussain (2012)* in the paper on the role of tourism in the socio economic development of Assam has identified inadequate infrastructure, insurgency, absence of tourist guides, lack of coordinated efforts and under-developed human resource as the major gaps in the sector that are required to be tackled. *Mili (2012)* in the research paper on rural tourism development has identified the problems in the use of local language, lack of financial support, problems related to communication, unavailability of trained tourist guides and absence of business planning skill with a professional touch as the major areas that are required to be addressed. *Bhattacharya (2008)* in his research work on tourism development in northeast India identified the need for professional management at the local government level to guide, coordinate and facilitate tourism. The paper also identified the need for a group of promoters and policy-makers to develop short and long-term tourism manpower development policies.

Rationale for the Study
Guwahati is regarded as the doorway to the entire north eastern part ofIndia. It occupies considerable significance in terms of making the economy aptly efficient and the existing markets economically viable. The meta-markets of various industries that exist are required to be capable enough to compete with any other similar markets in the region. This ultimately makes the economy sound and viable for the various stakeholders at large. Considering the fact that the regionis regarded as a tourism hotspot, Tourism industry has a important meta-market that has to be efficiently operated. Moreover tourism helps in earning revenue for the state and ultimately helps in moving the economy forward. Keeping the above facts in mind, the tourism industry appears to be an attractive market for conducting the study. Consequently the tourism meta-market has been selected for the study.

Objective of the Study

Based upon the need identified, the study has been conducted to find out the demand gaps available in the existing meta-market of tourism industry. Consequently the study tries to explore scope for productive ventures by identifying the above gaps.

Meta Elements of Tourism Meta-Markets

Tourism is an important sector for finding gainful employment and generating revenue. Based upon literature review, intuition and informal discussion, important meta-elements for the tourism meta-market has been identified. The elements identified are Bus Service, Food and Beverages, Cab Service (within city), Cab Service (intercity), Skilled Tourist Guide, Hotels, Motels, Tour operators / Consultants, Translators, Financial Services, Banking Services, Ticket Agents, Rural Tourism, Cultural Tourism, Wildlife Tourism, Adventure Tourism, Heritage Tourism and Religious Tourism.

Methodology

The nature of the research design was exploratory and sources of data were primary. The size of the sample taken for the survey was300 units. The sampling units comprise of the walking tourists of 15 hotels of Guwahati who used the hotels of Guwahati for night stay in their transit routes. And from each hotel 20 respondents have been taken. Information related to the meta-elements of each industry identified has been collected on the basis of preliminary pilot study and focus discussion with tourists in the city. Final data collection was collected through the administration of the questionnaire by direct face to face personal interviews. Two categories of questions characterize the questionnaire used which is tagged as 1(a) and 1(b).In order to tap the attitude of the consumers related to their general feeling on the need in the tourism related meta-elements for improvement, question no 1(a) has been used.

To measure the attitudes, simple 5 point scale with appropriate ratings has been used where, highly felt is denoted by 5, somewhat felt is denoted by 4, cannot say is denoted by 3, not felt is denoted by 2 and strongly not felt is denoted by 1. Question no 1(b) has been used to know the attitude of the consumers in relation to their degree of need felt for availability or improvement if any, among the meta-elements considered under the tourism industry meta-market.For measuring the attitudes of the respondents against the meta-elements, simple 5 point scale with appropriate ratings has been used where again highly felt is denoted by 5, somewhat felt is denoted by 4, cannot say is denoted by 3, not

felt is denoted by 2 and strongly not felt is denoted by 1. Average mean score and multiple regression analysis has been used for the processing of data. In the administration of multiple regression analysis, data collected by question no 1(a) has been used as the dependent variable and data collected by question 1(b) has been used as the independent variables.

Analysis

As per data collected through the questionnaire on the attitude of respondents related to degree of felt need for improvement in the respective meta-elements, mean score has been calculated as given in Table 1 below. As per the mean score of the individual meta-elements calculated as per the survey, has been found that elements namely Food and Beverages has a score of 4.37*, Cab Service (intercity)has a score of 4.81*, Skilled Tourist Guide has a score of 4.69*, Translators has a score of 4.81*, Rural Tourism has a score of 4.55*and Heritage Tourism has a score of 4.66*. These indicates that the scores are on the higher side above 4 which denotes that these identified items of the tourism meta-markethas gaps in terms of quality or quantity and consequently consumers feel that there is a need for easy availability or improvement of them.

Table 1 score of the meta-elements

	Individual Constituents	Mean Score
(i)	Bus Service	3.19
(ii)	Food and Beverages	4.37*
(iii)	Cab Service (within city)	2.96
(iv)	Cab Service (intercity)	4.81*
(v)	Skilled Tourist Guide	4.69*
(vi)	Hotels	2.67
(vii)	Motels	3.33
(viii)	Tour operators / consultants	2.95
(ix)	Translators	4.81*
(x)	Financial Services	3.16
(xi)	Banking Services	2.98
(xii)	Ticket Agents	3.02
(xiii)	Rural Tourism	4.55*
(xiv)	Cultural Tourism	3.31
(xv)	Wildlife Tourism	2.48
(xvi)	Adventure Tourism	3.59
(xvii)	Heritage Tourism	4.66*
(xviii)	Religious Tourism	3.31

On the other hand, elements like Bus Service having a score of 3.19, Cab Service (within city)having a score of2.96, Hotels having a score of2.67, Motels having a score of3.33, Tour operators / consultants having a score of2.95, Financial Services having a score

of3.16, Banking Serviceshaving a score of2.98, Ticket Agents having a score of3.02, Cultural Tourismhaving a score of 3.31, Wildlife Tourismhaving a score of2.48, Adventure Tourismhaving a score of3.59 and Religious Tourismhaving a score of3.31 do not have any significant requirement for improvement.Hence from the above Table 1, it can be said that the services / items namely Food and Beverages, Cab Service (intercity), Skilled Tourist Guide, Translators, Rural Tourism, and Heritage Tourism need improvement to make the Tourism meta-market more perfect.

To cross verify the above findings, multiple regression analysis is administered. Table no 2 shows the multiple linear regression model and statistics related to overall fit. Findings reveal that R of the model is 0.882 and R^2 of the model is 0.777. This denotes that the regression explains 77.7 percent of the variance of the data and the model is reasonably fit to tell about the variance. From Table 2, beta value is read and it can be said that elements namely Cab Service (intercity) (β=0.013, p ≤ 0.010), Skilled Tourist Guide(β=0.442, p ≤ 0.046), Translators (β=0.113, p ≤ 0.019), Rural Tourism (β=0.005, p ≤ 0.007), Heritage Tourism (β=0.361, p ≤ 0.042), have major influence in the creation of gaps in the tourism meta-market.

However items namely Bus Service (β=0.054, p ≥ 0.410), Food and Beverages (β=0.072, p ≥ 0.181), Cab Service (within city) (β=0.539, p ≥ 0.080), Hotels (β=0.260, p ≥ 0.301), Motels (β=0.261, p ≥ 0.291), Tour operators / consultants (β=0.231, p ≥ 0.145), Financial Services (β=0.032, p ≥ 0.102), Banking Services (β=0.255, p ≥ 0.173), Ticket Agents (β=0.238, p ≥ 0.262), Cultural Tourism (β=0.345, p ≥ 0.329), Wildlife Tourism (β=0.417, p ≥ 0.239), Adventure Tourism (β=0.294, p ≥ 0.206) and Religious Tourism (β=0.056, p ≥ 0.060), does not have significant influence in the available gaps of the Tourism meta-market.

Table 2: Multiple Regression Analysis of Tourism meta-market

Contribution of the individual elements of the Tourism meta-market			
R = 0.882	R square = 0.777	F = 73.78	Significance = 0.000
Elements of the meta-market	Standardized Coefficient (Beta)	T	Significance
Bus Service	0.054	1.081	.410
Food and Beverages	0.072	1.646	.181
Cab Service (within city)	0.539	17.027	.080
Cab Service (intercity)	0.013	0.264	.010*
Skilled Tourist Guide	0.442	9.569	.046*
Hotels	0.260	4.954	.301
Motels	0.261	6.202	.291
Tour operators / consultants	0.231	4.518	.145
Translators	0.113	2.480	.019*
Financial Services	0.032	0.902	.102
Banking Services	0.255	7.072	.173
Ticket Agents	0.238	5.702	.262
Rural Tourism	0.005	0.138	.007*
Cultural Tourism	0.345	7.881	.329
Wildlife Tourism	0.417	9.399	.239
Adventure Tourism	0.294	6.705	.206
Heritage Tourism	0.361	8.253	.042*
Religious Tourism	0.056	2.179	.060

Significant at 5% level of significance

Conclusion

From the statistical analysis conducted above, it can be inferred that in the tourism meta-market, elements namely Cab Service (intercity), Skilled Tourist Guide, Translators, Rural Tourism and Heritage Tourism have significant influence in the available gaps of the Tourism meta-market. On the other hand, items namely Bus Service, Food and Beverages, Cab Service (within city), Hotels, Motels, Tour operators and consultants, Financial Services, Banking Services, Ticket Agents, Cultural Tourism, Wildlife Tourism, Adventure Tourism and Religious Tourism does not have major influence in the creation of gaps in the meta-market.

Managerial Implications
Marketers who want to market products / services in the meta-market related to Tourism can be successful in the areas like Cab Service (intercity), Skilled Tourist Guide, Translators, Rural Tourism and Heritage Tourism. It can help them to make profits and sustain in the market as the identified areas still have gap or potential.

Limitations of the Study
The study was conducted in the first quarter of 2018. Therefore the study reflects market finding pertaining to this period only. With the passage of time, the identified gaps may be fulfilled by the marketers and therefore they may become invalid. Further the list of meta-elements under each of the service sector is not an exhaustive list. The more a researcher explores, the more meta-elements may be identified in the list under each sector.

Scope for Further Research
With the same elements, further research can be carried out in other geographical areas of the country to identify gaps. In the tourism meta-market, additional elements like wild life tourism, rural tourism, religious tourism, ethnography tourism and cultural tourism may be included as additional elements.

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